THE AMERICAN FASCISTS

BY DALE KRAMER

EVER since the financial crash numerous persons have believed that, given the opportunity, there would arise a party adept in propaganda and not averse to street brawls, who would attempt to seize the government. From time to time one outfit or another has been denounced as a fascist menace. No party has yet arisen that seems to have the promise of success, though there have been many starts. But the conditions in which a fascist movement might flourish remain. Where, after years of ambitious agitation, are these fascists? How strong are they? What are they saying, how are they saying it, and to whom?

Despite a hard early spring rain the crowd streams steadily into an upper hall of Ebling's Casino, 156th Street and St. Ann's Avenue in New York's lower Bronx. Tough-muscled young men, some with wide belts and armbands, stand at the door peering into each face. A stranger is asked: "Are you eligible for membership in the Christian Mobilizers?" After a moment of confusion the query's import is understood and the answer comes: "Yes." The guards put more questions to assure themselves that the visitor is not Jewish, then they permit purchase of a ten-cent entry ticket. Inside the hall are tables laden with Pelley's *Liberation*, Coughlin's *Social Justice*, Bund speeches, Winrod's *Defender*, the Mobilizers' own literature, and various independent anti-Semitic tracts. On the walls are heavy black slogans: "Buy Christian" and "Jobs for Christians."

When seven hundred persons have packed the auditorium a tall man of forty, of surprising poise and charm, appears without formality at the front of the hall, bids everyone rise, and administers the flag salute: "I pledge allegiance to my flag . . ." That done, he introduces "Rev. Herbert Lewis, among our staunchest speakers." Lewis, thirty-five, hair cropped close and his long oblong face mobile, comes forward. He is not a clergyman at all, but has borrowed the title from his father, a Brooklyn minister who is distressed by his son's activities.

He produces a copy of *The American Hebrew*. The crowd jeers happily. It is a mixed audience, drawn from a mixed area. In the lower Bronx live Irish, Italians, Jews, and Germans—all poor. The men seem odds and ends: shopkeepers, clerks, apartment-house superintendents, bartenders, minor salesmen, unemployed tradeless workers. The women, composing half the audience, are mostly housewives. Prior to the opening of the meeting they jabbered amiably among themselves as do women at weekly sessions of the women's club. Clothes are neither fashionable nor shabby.

The speaker's delivery is mediocre but he tries to offset this by copied tricks, lifting his voice, throwing back his head and uttering his words with studied hysteria. After reading an attack on the Mobilizers from the Jewish paper he pauses, leaps suddenly as high into the air as he can, spraddles his legs, and shouts "Hip, hip, hooray." After a lit-

tle, sweating hard, he desists and is replaced by James Stewart, about fifty, loosely tall, with lopsided face and long slanting nose. He climbs a dais behind the microphone and speaks slowly with studied pauses and inflections. He too reads from a Jewish paper, *The Examiner*, which carries an editorial charging Mayor LaGuardia and Police Commissioner Valentine with failure to curb the unbridled street-fighting tactics of the Mobilizers. LaGuardia's name is booed heartily. A plainclothes member of the New York police alien squad makes a surreptitious note of the fact. The speaker asks confidentially: "Do you know what the next month is?" Understanding, the audience applauds. "May," he goes on, "glorious May, when we go again into the streets." Suddenly a shout comes from the rear: "Throw out that spy!" The crowd tenses. Another joins the alarm: "That woman who just came in, that Jew with the goggles." The guards rush forward, confused. Two policemen, riot sticks held ready, appear from the anteroom. The tall chairman discovers who is meant and goes to her. By now the crowd is on its feet. From halfway back comes a terrifying cry, deep down. It is simply, "Get her out of here," but in it is the portent of action, of a mob ready to spring. The chairman lifts a restraining hand, leads the woman out, and refunds her money. Whether her protests of innocence are justified no one bothers to ascertain.

Hovering in the anteroom ready for a fanfare entrance is Joseph E. McWilliams, National Commander of the Mobilizers, most ambitious, belligerent—and perhaps most able—of America's aspiring "leaders." But following Stewart's address the chairman takes time to sell little books containing slips reading "Mr. Christian Merchant, the Christian Mobilizers' slogan is 'Buy Christian' and that is why I bought here" to be handed to merchants after purchases. The Mobilizers' telephone number, JErome 7-6527, is added in case the recipient wishes to communicate.

The crowd has had the preliminary courses and is ready for the main dish. McWilliams strides in and mounts the dais. His stocky figure, slightly above medium height, is clad in a padded-shoulder dark suit; a silk handkerchief protrudes nattily from the breast pocket. His wavy black hair is set carefully with Stacomb, the tips at the base of his skull fastidiously curled into little outward ringlets. He is drugstore-handsome, slightly younger in appearance than his thirty-six years. The deluge of oratory commences. His wit is broad. Newspapers are "Jewspapers," New Deal is "Jew Deal," Representative Dickstein, who has recently criticized fascist movements, is "Dickswine." The Stalin-Hitler pact has not reduced the hatred of Communists, for he is soon in full cry after them. Aliens are denounced. Then suddenly he turns on capitalism, flays it equally with the others, and, struggling hard to form his utterances into poetic cadence, paints a gawdy picture of utopia, following to a considerable degree the preachments of the Technocrats and the advocates of Production-for-Use.

II

The above description gives a fair idea of a typical American fascist mass meeting in 1940. "Commander" McWilliams' speech may be taken as an example of the approach which half a dozen years of groping in the dark waters of economic misery have taught fascist exponents is the most successful. First is the appeal known familiarly in inner circles as "the Antis"—anti-Jew, anti-Communist, anti-alien, anti-liberal, anti-New Deal. Second, a picture of the promised land once these forces of evil are swept away. In general the approach is not unlike that of Adolf Hitler, who had "Antis" a-plenty but also laid emphasis on ending unemployment, destroying "bad" capitalism, creating a Greater Germany—and even inserted the term "Socialist," popular with the German working men, in his party's name (Ger-

man National Socialist Workers Party). But most of the native fascists no longer wish to carry the analogy farther. They have decided, wisely from their point of view, to eliminate foreign trademarks. Like the Communists during the Popular Front period, they seek native slogans and heroes.

In this connection it is well to point out that most of the groups and individuals mentioned in this article resent application of the term "fascist." But the word has now become incorporated into the American language. It was originally taken of course from Mussolini's ("he made the trains run on time") Fascist Party. The term was later applied (but not by themselves) to Hitler's National Socialists because of the similarity of the two movements. Common use of the term spread as the world economic crisis deepened. In the end the word came to be applied to those who were more or less in sympathy with the extreme right, as opposed to those who grouped themselves around the Communists at the extreme left. Both Communists and Fascists have expressed studied contempt of the processes of democracy. Fascist sentiment generally reflects a militant nationalism, more often than not a strong racial and anti-Semitic bias, and a yearning for a "corporate" economic dictatorship. Sometimes the word has been used as a handy epithet to hurl at simple old-fashioned reactionaries, or even used as a general term of opprobrium, but properly employed, the term is applied to those whose aims and methods have been derived, directly or indirectly, from Hitler and Mussolini.

Italian fascism had its sympathizers in the United States during the 'twenties and early 'thirties, but the Fascist League of North America which in 1928 gave way to the Lictor Federation and Association of Italians Abroad, made little headway. Hitler's success, however, immediately inspired a host of petty promoters and racketeers who had battened on the Ku Klux Klan and similar groups. Professional Jew-baiters (and anti-Semitism is the cement which holds the fascist movement together) saw opportunity beyond their rosiest dreams.

Early entries into the field generally emulated Mussolini's black and Hitler's brown shirts. William Dudley Pelley, who was convicted in 1935 of a stock swindle, when not embarrassing Representative Martin Dies with praise, or trying to raise money along New York's Park Avenue, directs his Silver Shirts from Asheville, N. C. But not many shirts have been apparent; Pelley may be credited with leadership of the more psychopathic wing of the fascist movement, composed in the main of elderly women. George W. Christians of Chattanooga, Tenn., has what he calls "Crusader White Shirts," who, he says, are well drilled in military tactics. Some time ago they received orders to take over the government, a coup which failed, one presumes from reading the order, because Christians neglected to name a date. George Deatherage, a Cleveland engineer, recently disbanded his Knights of the White Camellia because, suffering from a dearth of platform ability, he hoped for greater success in influencing other groups.

These are only the noisier of the "shirt" variety; the list could be extended indefinitely and would include a fuehrer, generally with his own high-sounding title and vicious little newspaper, in almost every major city of the land. The Rev. L. M. Birkhead of Kansas City, who has studied fascist organizations rather intensively during the past four years, believes that one of every three persons in the United States is reached by fascist propaganda. He once counted 800 separate groups.

Fritz Kuhn's German-American Bund during its heyday last year also paraded in uniform. Once it packed 20,000 persons into Madison Square Garden, but Kuhn's imprisonment after he was convicted of stealing money from his own membership, together with splits in the secondary leadership, has injured the organization. There have been signs,

however, of infiltrations of Bundists into other, less tagged, groups, which leads to the belief that the real reason for cessation of public demonstrations is a change in tactics. Parades, uniforms, and heils served only to raise the gorge of the American public.

Another group has operated through more orthodox political channels. Huey Long, it was thought by many, had ambitions which could be labeled fascist. Certainly he had no objections to dictatorship so long as he was in the driver's seat, nor to violence by his underlings—witness the beatings administered to photographers by his bodyguards. But he was given to short-range thought and over-rashness—Mussolini and Hitler were careful, at any rate, not to get themselves assassinated. But Long did give utterance to a shrewd remark concerning American fascism: that it might very well come under the name of anti-fascism. After the Kingfish's death one of his assistants, the Rev. Gerald L. K. Smith, tried to carry on with the Share-Our-Wealth movement, but, though he was one of America's most powerful rabble-rousing orators, successful fascist leadership requires more brains than Smith can muster. He flirted fairly successfully with Dr. Francis E. Townsend, the old-age-pension miracle man, announced that he would organize a million storm troopers, then dropped out of sight. Now, from his headquarters in Detroit, he picks up a living by speaking for anti-union industrialists.

Congress at present is not quite free of members who are active on the fringes of these movements. The utterances of Senator Robert R. Reynolds of North Carolina, who has an organization called the Vindicators, and of at least three members of the lower House are in the general pattern. No one has yet been elected on an out-and-out fascist platform, however, although the Rev. Gerald Winrod gave Kansas political leaders a fright in 1938 when he entered the Republican primary for the U. S. Senatorial nomination. His chances seemed good until the attacks of former Presidential Nominee, Alfred E. Landon, and Republican National Chairman, John D. M. Hamilton, forced him into third place. Winrod, a fundamentalist preacher and Catholic baiter, has a wide following and his magazine, *The Defender*, carries his message to a large public.

This year several users of the fascist technic have indicated their intention to go before the voters. Joseph McWilliams has formed an "American Destiny Party"—with a covered wagon ringed with stars as its symbol—for a race for Congress from New York City's 18th district, which includes the German center of Yorkville with its strong Bund sentiment; "Goat-gland" John R. Brinkley, a stormy medicine-man, who some years ago established a powerful radio station in Mexico to avoid U. S. regulations, is thinking of returning to Kansas, where he once made a strong race for governor, to try for the U. S. Senate; Kenneth A. Brown, who blames the ills of the farmers on Jews, is running for Congress from Oregon; Newton Jenkins of Chicago is expected to run, as usual, for the House or Senate; and Louis B. Ward, editorial director of Father Coughlin's *Social Justice*, is out for a Michigan seat in the Senate.

Not exactly fitting into either of these categories—"shirt" or office seeker—is the Rev. Charles E. Coughlin, the radio orator. His career, unique in American public affairs, would have been impossible except for the radio. He began innocently as long ago as 1926 when WJR, Detroit, broadcast his sermons from his parish church in nearby Royal Oak and permitted him an afternoon period for talks to children. Sometimes he inserted a few remarks on economic matters with his sermons, but they seemed unimportant until the 1929 crash. Then letters poured in. In 1930 he organized the Radio League of the Little Flower and hooked in Chicago and Cincinnati stations. Reprints of his orations began to circulate among frightened

folk trying desperately to understand the cause of their troubles. Once a denunciation of Hoover, after more stations had been added, brought over a million letters—and enclosed in them were dimes and dollars. Then Roosevelt replaced Hoover and Father Coughlin shouted at New Deal enemies: Roosevelt or Ruin. He advocated cheap money and befriended the laboring man's efforts to form unions. But in 1936, after blowing hot and cold for a year, he changed his cry to Roosevelt *and* Ruin, put Representative William Lemke of North Dakota into the Presidential election on a hastily invented Union Party ticket, and seemed to be making a bid for power in his own right. Already Coughlin had been charged with fascist leanings, but it was only after Lemke's poor showing that he began to display them openly, until in the fall of 1938 he was ready for the chief element in fascist demagoguery—anti-Semitism. As a result, fascist activity has centered about his name. Coughlinism is the thread on which American fascism has been strung.

III

Only in New York City has fascism as yet become strongly enough organized to create a serious problem. But there an analysis of police court records reveals an amazing story—to a large degree kept from the public by a belief on the part of newspaper editors that the less said about it the better. Gangs of young hoodlums rove subway platforms late at night insulting Jews. A favorite tactic is to make jibes at a Jewish girl in the presence of her escort; the swain, thus provoked, attacks and is beaten by superior numbers. One youth, Irving Berger by name, was dangerously stabbed in such a fight in Grand Central station. A salesman for Father Coughlin's *Social Justice* becomes more and more incendiary in his anti-Semitic remarks until challenged by a hot-headed opponent. A fight results and if it is serious the participants are carted to jail. "Defense guards" circulate through the crowd as soap-box orators hold forth. A spot near a Jewish section has been chosen. The hope is that a Jewish resident of the neighborhood, insulted beyond a reasonable point, will intervene with a question or deprecatory remark. He will be jostled and the gathering "defended" against his effort to disrupt it.

The story of New York's street clashes goes back to the formation, or, more accurately, evolution of the Christian Front. The actual steps were unco-ordinated, but the movement may be said to have germinated inside the Musicians Union, fathered by two brothers, Jack and Harry Thorne, who objected to playing at benefits for the Spanish Loyalists. Charging Communist domination of the union, they endeavored to form a "Christian Front" to combat the United, or Popular, Front which they believed to be dominated by Communists. Because their employer, Bandleader Edwin Franko Goldman, with whom they eventually came into conflict, was Jewish, and because it has long been customary to link Jew and Communist, the anti-Semitic element crept in. Beginning in July, 1938, meetings were held in a hall belonging to the Paulist Fathers church on West 59th Street. But the Thorne boys had little interest beyond the issue within the union, and after a while the movement passed into the hands of Marcel Honoré, another musician, and Walter Ogden, a minor clerk in the Paulist rectory. From all parts of New York City drifted anti-Communists, anti-Semites, and pro-fascists—one of them a cocky young clerk for the Brooklyn Edison Company, John Cassidy, law student and budding orator, who in company with a youthful Italian fascist named Floyd Carridi had already held street-corner meetings in Brooklyn. Soon the church authorities heard rumors of violent fascist-sounding talk within the gatherings, and of "Buy Christian" stickers handed out. Thereafter the Front was denied the use of the hall. But the Christian Front—sometimes erroneously considered

a combination of groups, whereas it is a single organization—had by now taken shape, and it continued.

The group got its first chance to enter the public eye when late in 1938 Father Coughlin started his series of what sounded like anti-Semitic addresses. After carrying several of them, his New York City outlet, station WMCA, demanded scripts in advance, and, when they were not forthcoming, refused him the air. At once the Front seized upon the issue, threw a picket line of 2,000 persons round the station, and continued to mass its followers there for many months. Sometimes casual strollers in Times Square saw a whole army of police march in formation to the radio station, detailed to keep order. On Sundays, when numerous hawkers of *Social Justice* operated in Times Square, the police in order to prevent clashes formed lines on the sidewalks to create one-way pedestrian lanes.

As the spring of 1939 wore on and street activities became more pronounced, the extremist elements gained more and more power. Cassidy spoke out against the mildness of Honoré's and Ogden's leadership. James Stewart added his voice. And in June Joseph McWilliams, who had become popular as a Front orator, broke away and formed his rival Christian Mobilizers. He was joined by Stewart and other leaders. Partly as a result of this competition, the militant-talking Cassidy consolidated the leadership of the Front in his own hands and by the middle of July he was able to hear the voice of Father Coughlin himself, addressing a Philadelphia audience by telephone, intone: "God bless John Cassidy and the Christian Front." Backed by Coughlin, Cassidy assumed the title of "National Director" and it was not disputed.

Father Coughlin himself had called for organization into "platoons," and urged on by inflammatory addresses and editorials in *Social Justice*, the Christian Front under Cassidy increased its activities. In August the police, who by now were keeping a "fever chart" of fascist doings, reported to Mayor LaGuardia that 50 meetings with total attendance of over 20,000 were being held weekly—and added that the Mobilizers had passed the Front in activities, that McWilliams was moving into the New York fascist movement with an idea of consolidating it behind himself. Born in Oklahoma, McWilliams had learned at an early age to keep his eye on the main chance; as a promotor he always managed to keep himself well supplied with money, and once got $20,000 from the Gillette Safety Razor Company for an invention he had patented. Curiously, before becoming imbued with the idea of making himself America's Hitler, he had been particularly friendly with Jews. But once launched he pulled out all the stops, drawing to him the most irresponsible elements, some with criminal records. Subsequently in order to avoid embarrassment he had to dismiss some of these men. The Christian Front resisted the encroachment. Father Coughlin assisted the Front leaders by publicly returning a check sent to him by the Mobilizers and refused McWilliams an audience when, soon after the Mobilizers were formed, he went to Royal Oak in the hope of securing support. Meanwhile Cassidy denounced McWilliams as a "Communist," and a mysterious "Bill," an associate of Cassidy whom Cassidy was to wish devoutly he had never met, called the Mobilizers a bunch of tramps. All this tended to increase activities, but because McWilliams led the more violent element, his men figured oftener in brawls and as a result were oftener jailed.

The prosecutions followed a pattern. Louis Pepchinski of the Mobilizers drew a three-months sentence for offensive language and "felonious assault on Sergeant McAllister," reduced to simple assault by the Bronx Grand Jury. Benjamin Stafford of the Mobilizers was arrested for felonious assault on Captain Collins. This was reduced to simple assault by the Bronx Grand Jury, but

he was locked up in a State mental institution before his case came up. Edward Westphal, another Mobilizer, got six months for leading a crowd to the steps of a police precinct station and refusing to disperse it. He was placed on six months' probation. Peter Kirnan, Mobilizer, drew 90 days. Joseph Leveque and Ralph Ninfo (the latter a son of an American Labor Party city councilman who sadly renounced his offspring) went to the workhouse for 75 days. More than 238 persons were prosecuted during the summer of 1939 in connection with the outbreaks and 101 were convicted. The record shows, somewhat ironically, that more persons felt the weight of the law in fighting against the fascists than fascists themselves. Prosecutions stood: fascists 106, opponents 127. The 1940 season started auspiciously with McWilliams himself among those arrested.

IV

The nation was startled on the morning of January 14th last to learn that during the previous night agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation had arrested seventeen young New Yorkers and charged them with plotting to overthrow the United States government and to steal ammunition from the National Guard. The agents said the youths were members of the Christian Front. A quantity of rifles, ammunition, and bombs were seized. But it was not until the defendants went on trial early in April that the story began slowly to unfold.

During the height of New York's street demonstrations in the summer of 1939 a mild, plumpish little man had shoved through a revolving door into the lobby of the New Yorker Hotel at 34th Street and 8th Avenue, New York City, and without much difficulty located the man he had come to meet. He introduced himself and the two sat amiably down on a sofa for an hour's discussion. Peter J. Wacks, FBI agent, had "made contact" with the man who for six months was to act as informer to the G-men in their endeavor to get evidence of what they suspected was a plot to overthrow the government.

Wacks's visit to the New Yorker hotel was on August 4th but he did not begin the arduous task of spying on the seventeen Germans and Irishmen who were later arrested until early September. Certain incidentals had to be cared for. Denis Healy, an engineer for the New York Central Railroad who was subsequently to act as informer, was pumped of his, at that time, relatively meager knowledge of alleged subversive activities, and an arrangement worked out whereby Healy got $25 weekly for "expenses." But on September 7th Wacks was ready. He went to Hawthorne Street, Brooklyn, drove along a series of three-storey walk-up flats to No. 29 and placed it "under surveillance." At 4:30 P.M. he noticed a light-blue car, of which he had reason to be suspicious, drive up and a clerkish-appearing young man wearing glasses get out and enter the apartment. Nothing happened until six o'clock when two men, the one who had entered and a blocky, square-faced German with close-cropped hair, emerged and got into the car. Agent Wacks called the FBI and requested a companion. Three-quarters of an hour later Agent Julius Lopez joined him and they entered the hall, ascertained that a meeting of the Christian Front was soon to begin, and found seats. One of the ushers, Frank Malone, later arrested, presented the American flag with a Nazi salute during the customary pledge, so it seemed to Lopez, and the agents were permitted to hear their informer, Denis Healy, introduced as "a future machine-gunner for the Christian Front."

Amidst a burst of applause John Cassidy strutted to the platform. Denis Healy descended and went out. Agent Wacks followed him. But passing through the bar Wacks spied one of the men he had trailed to the place sitting at a table with two companions. One of them tallied with the description of a man he

wanted to meet. Agent Wacks interrupted the conversation long enough to ask the man known as "Bill" for change to get cigarettes from a vending machine and received a courteous reply in clipped accents which sounded British. Wacks went on outside and copied names from Denis Healy's cuff.

It was still hot on September 12th and when Agent Wacks got to Healy's bungalow in Queens he decided to put the microphone of his detectaphone in a basement nook which Healy had fitted up with a small bar. He set a little black-button microphone behind a Venetian blind and strung a wire outside the house to the attic. Probably he seemed overdressed for a radio repair man, but the neighbors might well have taken him for a go-getting salesman who had rolled up his sleeves to give on-the-spot service. Anyhow they wouldn't have taken such a good-natured, even baby-faced, lad for a secret agent out to thwart what seemed to him a gang of dangerous revolutionaries.

The attic was no fun for the G-men. That night it was suffocating hot and later the fingers of men grew cold trying to get down notes or operate recording machines. But Agent Wacks arranged a table and chairs, adjusted his equipment, and posted himself at the little window which looked on the street. Pretty soon the clerkish man whom he had seen in the blue car came up the sidewalk and rang the bell.

Claus Gunther (Nick) Ernecke, the guest, didn't know the liquor he drank and the pheasant dinner he ate were paid by the government, so he talked freely, keeping Agent Wacks' pencil flying. Down went a remark that the Christian Front was organized to get rid of the Jews and finally take over the country. Ernecke said things were going only so-so at present—about the same as for Hitler at the time of the beer hall putsch. "It's this way," he said: "We lose—we're dead. We win—we control the country."

But Ernecke was never to hear from Agent Wacks's lips the summary of his remarks. Wacks did not take the witness stand until two weeks after the trial opened, and by then Ernecke had made at least one of his predictions good: failure—death. After a few days of testimony, he walked into the basement of an apartment house two blocks from his residence, threw a narrow cord over a low steam pipe, looped it round his neck, and doubled his knees.

The only quotations Ernecke heard were from Denis Healy's little mauve notebook. It developed that after learning something of the group's aims from Ernecke, Healy, son of a British secret agent who operated in Ireland during "the Trouble," had telephoned FBI headquarters. The appointment with Agent Wacks resulted. Because his schooling hadn't amounted to much (he was uncertain of his place of birth and early years), Healy, now in his late thirties, had taught himself to print rapidly rather than to write, and after each meeting or conversation he printed his recollections in the little five-cent notebook.

During the fall and winter G-men wired their informer's house and sat in the attic. To the house came a dish-washing machine salesman in whose apartment at 29 Hawthorne Street Ernecke had a room, Prussian-faced Macklin Boettger, to tell of his caches of ammunition. National Guard Captain John Prout, manager of a telegraph branch in private life, came for dinner and the listeners heard Healy ask him how he had got hold of government ammunition. One night in December, so cold that the FBI's recording machine worked badly, there was great clicking of bottles and even the falling of bodies. "What," the agent heard a voice say, "would the Goddamned G-men think if they could see us now?" John Viebrock, an elevator mechanic, who had a workbench in his basement where he manufactured bombs, brought paraphernalia to Healy's house to explain how it was done. It was reported that they talked of blowing up the *Daily Worker*,

Communist publication, the Cameo Theater where Russian films were shown, and the police department itself. The youngest defendant, eighteen-year-old William Bushnell, ex-Boy Scout bugler who when arrested offered G-men chocolate cake and got them to wait until he had finished off a piece himself, was sent to sketch the floor plans of the *Daily Worker* in order to facilitate bombing. On the witness stand he refused to answer "yes" or "no" when asked if he would have carried out an order to hurl a bomb.

From time to time the informer Healy made reports on events or conversations to which the G-men had no entree. These were made to the omnipresent Wacks, always hovering nearby, who advised on each step. Healy signed an application blank for membership in the Christian Front on Wacks's order, bought a rifle and ammunition, and agreed tacitly and sometimes otherwise with the wild talk of the alleged conspirators. When "Bill" and Cassidy quarreled and broke, Wacks ordered his man to join "Bill," the militarist.

During the palmy days "Bill," who went on trial as William Gerald Bishop but is said by the government to be really William Hrnecek, native of Vienna who entered this country illegally in 1926, allowed members of the inner circle to address him only upon being spoken to. But he sat friendless in the courtroom. No bail was raised for him. Something had happened apparently to his patrons, two women who paid him one hundred and sixty dollars monthly so that he might pursue a literary career. About thirty-five, well built, with carrot hair on his wedge-shaped head, he reminded reporters of Bruno Hauptmann, though with a less sensitive face. Professed writer, he nevertheless was angered by a request for a bibliography of his works. But he could talk. The others gathered round to hear tales of derring-do in his fighting days with General Franco and —apparently at one and the same time— his campaign aid to Representative Thorkelson of Montana. (There is no reason to suppose that Thorkelson ever even heard of Bishop.) When someone spoke of fear he held a lighted cigarette to his wrist until the flesh sizzled. He talked of the Talmud, Marx, Rasputin, sex, Kropotkin, occultism—and Bishop. His custom was to raise an esoteric topic, express surprise at his listeners' ignorance of it, then launch a monologue. He was an intellectual bully, yet was not without some qualifications for leadership.

Bishop told the leaders that he had been sent—by whom it was never clear—to organize the best elements of the Front into an "action committee," which, he said, had a membership of 300,000. He made all the rules. Once two men were said to have been delegated by him to steal ammunition from National Guard trucks on the way to annual encampment; but Cassidy asserted himself and stopped that. Cassidy says he was against such tactics; at any rate he was tired of watching Bishop assume leadership.

But Cassidy, who himself once took, and flunked, the G-man tests, was one of the party of ten who on October 21st participated in rifle practice at Narrowsburg, N. Y.—as he later admitted at the trial—under the hidden lenses of Agent Wacks's moving-picture camera. Denis Healy took along two quarts of rye—purchased out of his FBI expense fund. As rifle practice got under way the agents, hidden in the forest, pressed the button of their camera. Later the court was to see figures rushing forward, falling prone, and shooting at what Denis Healy said was a target labeled "President Roosevelt's head."

When government authorities thought they had evidence enough a force of G-men was gathered, J. Edgar Hoover went to New York City, and late on the night of January 13th they went to Brooklyn to make the arrests. There was little trouble. One man, it is true, was arrested in error, and Agent Higgens became slightly confused and had to inquire of his captive, Bushnell, the route to

Manhattan. But in Boettger's apartment considerable ammunition was found; Viebrock stood smilingly pointing to his bomb-making utensils while the agents industriously cranked a moving-picture camera. Guns were found in the homes of some of the others. Seven rifles, ammunition, cordite powder, and partly made bombs were gathered.

For their part, the defendants declared that the purpose of the Christian Front and the action committee was defense against a possible Communist revolution; that practice in the use of firearms and bombs had defense of America as its aim. For almost three months the jury heard evidence, and for five more days they pondered it. Judge Marcus B. Campbell had already freed two from lack of evidence. Ernecke was dead by his own hand. The jury freed nine others, including the Christian Front's national director, Cassidy, and failed to agree on the guilt of Bishop, Boettger, Viebrock, Prout, and Bushnell.

The youthful defendants (average age was twenty-nine) got ovations from three hundred sympathizers who had waited patiently in the corridors for the verdict. Cassidy drew the cheers of a martyred leader. That the five who failed of acquittal will go on trial again is not certain. The probable result was the end of traffic with firearms and bombs but increased prestige for Cassidy and the Christian Front.

V

When Father Coughlin heard about the arrest of seventeen of his followers he hastily turned a cold shoulder. But by next day he had changed his mind, and told the press that he was taking his post at their side. That was like Coughlin. Politicians are seldom noted for inflexibility, but close scrutiny of Father Coughlin's career forces one to the conclusion that he lacks political judgment. Moreover, there is reason to believe that Coughlin himself has finally given up hope for personal power, an ambition which at one time he undeniably cherished, and now thinks of himself as a "teacher," or at most an adviser.

Contrary to the view of his admirers, Coughlin is no student of political and economic affairs. His economic arguments defy analysis and his political naïveté has been little short of astounding. Not only is he plainly unfamiliar with American history and politics, but he suffers from a chronic inability to take the advice of anyone who does; or, equally disastrous, he takes the advice, generally contradictory, of everyone. Only a single individual was able consistently to direct his actions: Huey Long. The Kingfish would get Coughlin on the long-distance telephone, demand incorporation of certain material in a radio speech—perhaps a request for a telegraphic flood upon Congress. Whether so supreme an egoist would have long played a second fiddle in Long's orchestra is questionable, but at the time of his death Long had Coughlin firmly in tow.

With other reporters, this writer conversed with the radio oracle at the peak of his career. In October, 1936, Coughlin was convinced that he could deliver a minimum of 9,000,000 votes to Representative William Lemke of North Dakota, his personally nominated and manipulated candidate for President. Huge audiences were turning out to see the man behind the radio voice. Starry-eyed followers had fought at the huge convention of his National Union for Social Justice to touch the very hem of his garment, and he had alliances with the powerful Townsend old-age-pension movement and with Gerald Smith, who controlled the remnants of Long's Share-Our-Wealth organization. Lemke himself, co-author of the Frazier-Lemke farm mortgage moratorium and the Frazier-Lemke debt-refinancing bill, had an important agricultural following. So confident was Coughlin, in fact, that he promised his retirement from radio if Lemke should fall short of the 9,000,000 vote goal set for him.

Coughlin is strangely unresponsive to

physical audiences, but behind the microphone he reaches a high emotional state, gesturing excitedly. This writer, with other members of the press, conferred more or less informally with him in a small rear studio of a Des Moines radio station while he waited to re-broadcast his regular weekly address to the West Coast. In private Coughlin is soft-spoken, good-natured, and possessed of much personal charm, although humorless. But after a broadcast he is highly nervous and paces rapidly to and fro. That night, exalted by success, he peered grandly into the future. The United States, he declared, was seeing its last Presidential election. "We are at the crossroads. One road leads to Communism, the other to fascism. I take the road to fascism." The remark was unfortunate and immediately began to annoy him in the press, on the March of Time radio program, and elsewhere. He went on to say that long before Hitler's name was even known in this country he had been a student of the German's propaganda technic. He himself intended to employ attacks on "Wall Street" and "the politicians," besides the Communists, as prime agitations methods, but would not follow Hitler into anti-Semitism. But Lemke got a mere 800,000-odd votes. Coughlin sat in his Royal Oak office stunned, tears streaming down his cheeks. It was beyond comprehension.

For a long time he had no stomach for politics; the National Union for Social Justice was extinguished with a flip of his hand, and he left the air. But *Social Justice* continued, more and more defending the German Nazis and Italian Fascists—once even calling democracy "a mockery"—and Coughlin himself came out for the corporate state, the essential prerogative of the fascist system. And the radio broadcasts were resumed.

Coughlin had said that anti-Semitism would not work in this country, but his associates knew him to be personally anti-Semitic, possessor of an elaborate library on the subject. His friends had long included the violently anti-Semitic wing of the Wall Street stock and money exchanges, and his sub-leadership both in Royal Oak and throughout the nation was heavily salted with professional Jew-baiters. But no reason for the sudden shift to not-so-veiled anti-Semitic utterances is apparent unless the decision grew out of personal bitterness or was a shot in the arm to offset indifference to his addresses. At any rate, it was the first widespread application of what we have come to term the Nazi propaganda technic. *Social Justice* printed a favorite document of anti-Semites, the forged Protocols of the Elders of Zion, and developed ominous overtones about the word "Christian."

But the same factors which, along with his lack of political sagacity, have always prevented consolidation of his strength, kept Coughlin from capitalizing on the furor he had provoked. As a priest he has been unable to get down into the real labor and rough and tumble of politics, the actual day-to-day building of a political party machine. And as a priest he could not for long disregard his church's opposition to anti-Semitism. He subsided into relatively colorless discussions of money, a subject whose possibilities he had already wrung dry.

Whether Coughlin will find some other method of drawing the lightning of public attention to himself is impossible of course to say. On the 25th of June, when the Christian Front defendants were acquitted, Coughlin issued a statement saying that "the result of all this will be that the Christian Front movement will emerge more vigorous and potent than ever." That the Front has now got its martyrs and that its activity will increase is pretty certain—Coughlin says also that the wave of anti-Semitism will probably grow—but that does not necessarily promise to advance Coughlin's own career very much. The evidence is against his open entry into the political arena, even to the extent of his ill-fated venture of 1936.

Even more remote from the sweaty

political world are the fascist intellectuals, a small but relatively active band. First place in this category is undeniably held by Lawrence Dennis, author of *The Coming American Fascism*, and *The Dynamics of War and Revolution*. In line with the new approach, he avoided the term "fascism" in the latter book published recently. Dennis has advised Joseph McWilliams and other aspiring leaders, but his own addresses are in the nature of lectures to intellectual audiences; he admits, however, that he would not turn down a call to power. Another is Philip Johnson of the Johnson & Johnson medical supplies manufacturing family; with a young friend named Alan Blackburn he joined first Huey Long and then Father Coughlin in an endeavor to serve as braintruster, and last fall he accompanied the German army into Poland as correspondent for *Social Justice*. Just now Dennis and Johnson have rented office space from which they expect to publish a magazine in line with their views. Harold Lord Varney, who used to publish the richly printed *Awakener*, and Seward Bishop Collins, who edited the *American Review*, are other members of the entourage.

Like their more vulgar brethren, the intellectuals are not united, and seldom express high regard for one another, but most of them have in one way or another aided in building the American Fellowship Forum. This organization, founded, according to its literature, "by a small group of business and professional men," is directed by Friedrich E. Auhagen, a naturalized German who taught German at Columbia University between 1929–35 and who lists himself as a speaker for the Foreign Policy Association and the Town Hall of the Air.

From offices at 11 West 42nd Street Auhagen, tall, personable, and a capable speaker, organizes meetings and debates, usually in ballrooms of the better hotels in the larger cities, and publishes a newsletter called *The Forum Observer* and a magazine, *Today's Challenge*. *Today's Challenge* was suspended in December, 1939. Lawrence Dennis and Philip Johnson are frequent contributors and speakers. Though an early Nazi in his fatherland, Auhagen says he is out of the movement, but wishes Germany to defeat Great Britain and France so that the United States will "wake up" and organize its industry along rational—*i.e.*, something like the Fascist-Nazi corporate state—lines. But the fascist label is avoided so far as possible, and, as might be supposed, stress has been placed recently on keeping America out of the European war—an unfortunate circumstance for *bona fide* peace groups.

The law requiring registration with the State Department of agents of foreign principals was an embarrassment to Auhagen since George Sylvester Viereck, an assistant editor of *Today's Challenge*, registered as an employee, at $500 monthly, of the German government organ *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*. He was dropped from the masthead of *Today's Challenge* but articles from his pen appeared subsequently. And a correspondent who had been receiving propaganda material from the German Library of Information (a registered German agency located in the same building as the German consul in New York City) under a name used for no other purpose, suddenly commenced receiving mail addressed to that name from the American Fellowship Forum. A natural conclusion was that the German agency had loaned its mailing list to the Fellowship Forum.

VI

How many Americans accept the idea of a fascist government? Since the hysteria resulting from revelations of "Fifth columns" in Norway, Holland, Belgium, and even France and England there have been many frightened estimates. Representative Dies says "millions of enemies" exist within our borders; though the statement also includes Communists, he must believe a few millions are fascists or fascist sympathizers. Mrs. John L. Whitehurst, first vice

president of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, broke Page 1 of the *New York Times* with a startled speech decrying the number of women ready to vote for dictatorship. And according to a Gallup poll—reported January 9, 1939—of 3,500,000 men and women who listened regularly to Father Coughlin, 67 per cent agreed with him. Slightly more than half of the 15,000,000 who listened occasionally had faith in his views.

Yet one would wish a strict definition of Mr. Dies' term "enemy" before taking his estimate too seriously, and it can hardly be concluded from the Gallup figures, even though the anti-Semitic addresses had by then been delivered, that seven or eight million Americans consciously favor fascism, even in the diluted form that Father Coughlin suggests it. Rather, the majority probably agree simply that things haven't been going any too well in America these past few years. Without questioning Mrs. Whitehurst's sincerity, or even alarm, it may be judged that the Women's Clubs will not insert a dictatorship plank in their platform for some time.

On the other hand, the foothold gained in New York and other large cities by use of "Anti" slogans is not to be dismissed. While some of this can be laid to the inevitable clash of nationalities and races living in close proximity, it cannot be forgotten that this nation has had several important prejudice movements. The Ku Klux Klan is example enough—and lately the Klan has shown signs of resurgence. The Catholic magazine *Wisdom* has printed a charge that Joseph McWilliams, Mobilizers' leader, is a Klan member. The Republican Party for a great many years after the Civil War won elections by waving the Bloody Shirt, and prior to that the anti-alien Know Nothing movement was not without its influence. Another factor is the lightning rapidity with which movements sometimes spread in the United States. During the past few years the country has seen the growth of Townsendites, Epics, Ham 'n' Eggers, and others, none in themselves fascist, but of the stuff out of which fascism is made.

One thing seems fairly certain however. The "leader" has not yet come forward, and the formula is still in the process of development. Hitler, an astute man, said that National Socialism was not for export, by which he probably meant that fascism would of necessity take a different outward form in each country—just as there were important differences between the slogans of Mussolini and Hitler. Huey Long's thesis of fascism in the possible guise of anti-fascism carries the point a little farther. But of some things we can be certain: American fascism will seek to hide its face even more than in the past, and it will keep the major tenet of all fascism—super-patriotism and nationalism. The latter fact alone has permitted the American fascists to outdistance the American Communists—though no fascist group has yet matched the followers of Stalin in tight effectiveness of party discipline and organization. It should also be pointed out that, since the terms communist and fascist are sometimes thought synonymous, communist parties of the world predicate their coming to power upon violent seizure of government—though the fact became confused during the recent Popular Front period; while both Mussolini and Hitler came to power by peaceful, if not exactly democratic, means and afterward established their dictatorships. Fascism also gets at least an initial advantage over communism by adding prejudices to hopes of ordinary people for a better life.

That a fascist movement is difficult to counter is apparent from the efforts of Mayor LaGuardia to check the relatively open and none too well led activities of New York's street agitators. Had he put an arbitrary curb on them, as suggested by some Jewish and liberal groups, he would have been guilty of suppressing freedom of speech. An outright plea or denunciation would have been useless, since the anti-Semitic agitators wasted no love on him. His answer then was to

attack the problem indirectly. Two of his secretaries, Nathan Frankel and Byrnes McDonald, were set to work on a survey of the problem. Aided by the police department's alien squad, they charted the little fuehrers and their activities, and, once the situation was understood, the police gathered specific evidence, generally of "offensive language," and hauled offenders into court. At the same time the picket line round station WMCA was reduced from 300 to 4 and sellers of *Social Justice* and like material were placed under restrictions. The Mobilizers' McWilliams says the arrests were helpful; the mayor holds a contrary view. Probably arrests in sufficient numbers—the 1940 season commenced auspiciously—do put a brake on activities; but it is obvious that the method works only where utterances are especially scurrilous or fights break out. And John Cassidy, whose Christian Front was not so violent in speech or action as McWilliams' Mobilizers, suffered arrest by G-men because a few of his men were storing ammunition and bombs and talking of using them—a quite unnecessary error from a fascist point of view. It seems likely, therefore, that authorities—unless a different interpretation is placed upon civil liberties—can do little to prevent free spread of propaganda so long as overt acts are avoided.

As for the immediate future of the American fascists, it is certain to be governed by the progress of the war. Already the term "Fifth column" has become an epithet. Frederick Auhagen, leader of the Fellowship Forum, has referred to the New York *Herald-Tribune*, which advocated our entry into the war, as a "Fifth column." When Clarence Budington Kelland, the author, said during the course of a talk in the New York Dutch Treat Club that America's Fifth Column is led by That Man in the White House it made Hendrik Van Loon, a fellow-author, so angry that he rushed out and penned his resignation from the club, of which Kelland is president. And the usual platoons of witch hunters took for granted that the enemy must naturally be found in the ranks of the unemployed and labor—quite forgetting that most of the Fifth columnists identified in foreign nations, such as Major Quisling of Norway and Conservative M. P. Archibald Ramsey of England, were men of high station. Besides, anti-alien hysteria may eventually aid the fascists, who always pose as superpatriots. Senator Reynolds and Representative Thorkelson are most industrious in introducing anti-alien bills.

But for the time being "Fifth column" hysteria will serve to curb the open sympathizers of fascism. It will take time for a powerful movement to organize itself out of the confusion caused by the war. But the technic of prejudice politics has been so well learned that should economic insecurity continue there can be no doubt that the American people during the next decade will be forced to deal with powerful "hate" movements. Great vigilance will be required to preserve our liberty without giving it up in the process.